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ABSTRACT

A description is given of an introductory foundations of education course that requires students to participate in a field experience in the public schools and link their observations to the broader, more theoretical issues in education through a variety of classroom and writing activities. The course, through its design, is particularly effective in a liberal arts college curriculum because it capitalizes on a mix of students, not just teachers-to-be. it is noted that the course is not only an effective starting point for prospective teachers, it also serves as a means of informing noneducators about important issues, and as a vehicle for attracting undergraduates into the teaching profession. A description, illustrated by 13 graphs, is given of the characteristics of 66 students who had taken the course, based on a questionnaire distributed on the last day of class. (JD)

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MAKING INTRODUCTORY FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION COURSES MORE EFFECTIVE: The Case of Educational studies 201, Emory University

Presented by Charles E. Strickland

and Thomas V. O'Brien

at

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ABSTRACT

This presentation describes an introductory foundations of education course that is taught at Emory University. The course requires students to participate in a field experience and link their observations to the broader, more theoretical issues in education through a variety of classroom and writing activities. The presenters argue that this course -- through its design -- is particularly effective in a liberal arts college curriculum because it capitalizes on the strengths of a heterogeneous mix of students. The presenters conclude that the course not only is an effective starting point for teachers-to-be, but also a means of informing non-educators about important issues, as well as a vehicle for attracting undergraduates into the teaching profession.

Part One: Course Design and Purpose

Recently Suzanne Wilson (1990) challenged researchers who study teacher education programs to look beyond the problems that appear on the surface, and dig deeper into the problems of training teachers. As part of this digging, foundations of education courses have received a good deal of critical study in recent years, and there is a growing consensus that there seems to be little, if any, planned linkage between foundations courses and effective teaching (Gottlieb & Cornbleth, 1988; Sirotnik, 1990). Indeed some of the most recent studies seem to imply that foundations of education are in such a desperate plight that any talk of making such courses more effective is tantamount to flogging a dead horse.

One of the most influential of these pessimistic assessments is John Goodlad's Teachers for Our Nation's Schools. (Goodlad, 1990). To be sure, Goodlad's pessimism extends to the entire teacher education enterprise, and not just to the foundations courses, but his critique of the foundations area is particularly biting. After noting the precipitous decline in foundations courses since the early 1960s, he notes that they have been replaced for the most part by methods courses. He reports that students in teacher training programs bring with them a nearly exclusive interest in the practical,or technical aspects of teacher training, making them impatient with the efforts of

foundations professors to introduce them to the social context of education, and in particular of the efforts of education professors to promote thought about the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching. Even though Goodlad deplores this anti-intellectualism on the part of students, he does not suggest just how it might be combatted. Lacking any suggestions for solutions, one of Goodlad's collaborators on his massive study of teacher education has concluded that the only reasonable conclusion is to abolish foundations courses altogether (Sirotnik, 1990).

In the face of these negative reports, we are going to describe an introductory foundations course which is not only popular with students, but which is effective in orienting them to the field of education and, for those who choose to become teachers, effective in laying a foundation for further pedagogical study. Moreover --making our heresy even more egregious--we are going to describe a course whose basic design and purpose is one which Goodlad says should have no place in a teacher education program.

The basic design and purpose of Emory's Educational Studies 201 are determined not only by the individual instructors of the various sections and by the faculty of the Division of Educational Studies, but as well by the Arts and Sciences faculty of Emory College. The Arts and Sciences faculty decided 20 years ago that this introductory course should count as partially fulfilling the

distribution requirements toward graduation from Emory college. Moreover, this same faculty decided 20 years ago that Educational Studies 201 should be the entry course for a liberal arts undergraduate concentration called "Educational Studies" which is a liberal arts major that does not lead to teaching certification. Finally, the faculty of the Division of Educational Studies decided that Educational Studies 201 should be the entry course also for our undergraduate education major which does lead to teacher certification. The result is a course that serves a variety of student clients, some of whom are committed to teaching, some of whom are trying to make up their minds whether or not they wish to become teachers, and others who are simply interested in studying education as they would any other liberal arts subject.

From Goodlad's point of view, this basic design is a mistake, leading to a course which is a "hodgepodge" of topics and one which discredits the teacher education enterprise. He argues that students who are not yet accepted into teacher education programs should not be admitted to education courses. Goodlad says that "accessibility of education courses to students not yet accepted to programs perpetuates the legacy of teaching as the not-quite profession." (Goodlad, 1990, p. 205) Commenting on the practice of allowing non-certification students to take education courses, Goodlad comments:

> It is difficult to think up any reasonable

> argument to support this haphazard approach to admission --an approach taken by many of the campuses we visited. The argument that dabbling in education courses provides opportunities to decide on teaching as a career simply does not wash. By general student and frequent faculty admission, many of the courses in which one might enroll pertain little to teaching anyway. The tragedy is that this kind of sloppiness only perpetuates the cloud of low status under which teacher education, teacher educators, and candidates for teaching labor and suffer. (Goodlad, 1990, p. 206)

Contrary to Goodlad's view, we would argue that the mix of students, who bring to Emory's Educational Studies 201 a mix of motivations, is not only workable, it is positively beneficial. Moreover, we would argue further that it is possible within such a context to discover ways of unifying the practical and the theoretical. It has been our experience that Goodlad is correct when he asserts that most teacher education students bring with them a bias in favor of the practical, technical aspects of teaching. However, we would point out that the broad spectrum of students who enroll in our course actually increases the proportion of those who have an interest in the more academic and

more theoretical dimensions of education. Even they, however, can benefit from exposure to the practical, and for them as well as for their more technically-oriented peers, we have built into our introductory course exposure to the public school classroom. One of the most popular features of the course with our students is the requirement that they spend a minimum of two hours each week for eight weeks as a participant/observer in a local public school, either as a tutor or as a teacher assistant. This provision not only satisfies the yearning of the committed teacher-to-be for a baptism of fire in a real teaching situation, but it also provides an opportunity for those not yet committed to a teaching career to make up their minds about a teaching career, and a real-life test of educational theory for those students who are interested in studying education as a part of their liberal arts education.

Valuable as the participant/observer experience is, the key to the uniqueness of Educational Studies 201 is the way this classroom experience is linked to the academic side of the course. This linkage is secured by the requirement that students keep a detailed journal of their experience, and to submit the journal to the instructor for evaluation. Moreover, the students are required to go beyond mere description of what goes on in the classroom. (See handout, "Guide to Keeping a School Journal") Students are required to react thoughtfully to what they are observing, and they are required to link what they are observing to the issues and themes we dealing with in the class sessions of

Educational Studies 201. These issues and themes, conveyed through lectures, videos, discussions and a set of required readings, center around questions of educational values and social justice and the implications of these issues for judging and reforming public schools and the teaching profession. (See handout, Syllabus for EDS 201). Students are also required to read and review a selected book about schools and teaching and provide a oral and written review of it before their fellow students (See handouts, "Books for Review," and "Guide for Writing Book Reviews"). Finally, both the school experience and the more academic exercises in our Educational Studies 201 classes are unified through the requirement that the students design, as a final examination, either an elementary or a secondary public school which, in their opinion, would be a place where teachers could teach and children could learn. (See handout, "Design for a School") This examination, needless to say, requires the student to reflect upon his classroom observations and link it to the larger questions of school structure and reform we are dealing with in the class.

And now, for a report on how our students have responded to this course design, here's my colleague, Tom O'Brien.

MAKING INTRODUCTORY FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION COURSES MORE EFFECTIVE

Part Two: An Empirical Study

In our attempt to dig deeper into the problems of teacher education, we took a closer look at Educational Studies 201 as seen through the eyes of the students who endured it. In the spring of 1990 sixty-six undergraduates from three sections of EDS 201 filled out questionnaires on the final day of class. The questionnaire had two major purposes: (a) to determine what parts of the course enhanced student interest in teaching, and (b) to determine what effect the course had in attracting Emory students into the teaching profession. We also collected information about the characteristics of our sample, and this is where we will start.

In figure 1.1 the handout you will see that:

>79% of the undergraduates in the sample were female, and 21% were male.

>18% were freshmen, 36% sophomores, 16% juniors, and 30% seniors. (fig. 1.2)

It is noteworthy that 30% of our sample were seniors, many of whom were non-educational studies majors. Many of these students were interested in learning about the role education and schools play in society. Others were considering an M.A.T. and used this course as a critical decision maker.

>nearly one half of the sample had a GRADE POINT AVERAGE between 3.0 and 3.4 (the B range), while approximately one

fifth was in the A range, and another one fifth in the C range. Less than 10% of the sample had a GPA at or below 2.4. (fig. 1.3)

When asked about how they found out about EDS 201, 39% said they read it in the catalogue, 41% talked to a friend who had taken it. Moreover, 47% responded that the decided to take the course because it sounded interesting.

Turning to students' intended majors, we found that UPON ADMISSION to Emory (fig. 2.1):

27% of our sample was undecided
19% chose the natural sciences
40% social sciences
10% humanities
1.5% intended to double major
2.5% did not respond or remember, and
0% intended to major in educational studies

At the time these undergraduates ENROLLED IN EDS 201 (fig. 2.2):

11% of our sample was undecided (a drop of 16 percentage points)
11% chose the natural sciences (a drop of 8 points)
39% social sciences (same)
30% humanities (an increase of 20 points)
4.5% intended to double major
3% chose education (and teacher certification)
1.5 decided to double major with one of those majors being educational studies (and chose to get certified)

Thus, there was a 4.5% increase in the sample who chose to major in educational studies between their first day of college and their first day of class in EDS 201.

At the time the students filled out the questionnaire (which again, was on the last day of class) (fig. 2.3):

11% of our sample was still undecided

11% still chose the natural sciences

32% chose social sciences (a drop of 7 points)

26% chose humanities

4.5% intended to double major (same)

7.5% chose education,and teacher certification (an increase of 4.5 points)

8% decided to double major with one of those majors in educational studies, and certification (an increase of 6.5 points)

This translates to an 15.5% increase in those who selected Educational Studies as their major between the time of acceptance to Emory, and the completion of the course.

In our attempt to find out which parts of Educational Studies 201 enhanced student interest in the profession of teaching we found that:

The FIELD EXPERIENCE (fig. 3.1)enhanced the most interest, followed by the EMORY INSTRUCTOR and the CLASS DISCUSSIONS (fig 3.2). Next, the VIDEOS (fig. 3.3) enhanced one half of the samples' interest in teaching followed closely by the BOOK REVIEW (47%). Students found the ASSIGNED READINGS to

be the weakest aspect of the course, with slightly more than one-half (55%) noting that it had no effect on enhancing their interest in the teaching profession (fig. 3.4).

Anticipating that the FIELD EXPERIENCE was a critical component, we probed deeper into its constitution:

>65% of the sample identified WORKING WITH THE CHILDREN as the greatest "enhancer" of their interest in the teaching profession. (fig. 4.1)

>88% responded that KEEPING A JOURNAL on their field experience helped them to focus their thoughts about the education process (fig 4.3).

>Only one fourth of the students assessed their supervising teacher as an EXCELLENT model of teaching. 42% said that s/he was a GOOD model of teaching. 20% said the supervising teacher was an average teacher, while 4.5 said that the s/he was a LOUSY teacher (fig. 4.2).

In CONCLUSION, we found that:

1) OVER three-quarters of those who took Educational Studies 201 were females.

2) Educational Studies 201 drew Emory undergraduates from a variety of different graduation years, and

3) Nearly all Emory undergraduates who took the introductory foundations of education course had respectable, if not impressive, overall GRADE POINT AVERAGES.

In reference to what these students chose as their major:

1) Upon acceptance to Emory College, over one fourth were

undecided on a major, while zero (NOT ONE) chose to major in educational studies.

2) Upon signing up for the course, 4.5% had chosen to major or double major in educational studies, and

3) Upon completing the course, 15.5% sought to major or double major in educational studies. Of this group, only one student was majoring in educational studies without taking the additional steps to get certified.

In reference to the parts of the course that enhanced student interest in the teaching profession, we found that:

1) The FIELD EXPERIENCE, specifically that part of it involving WORKING WITH KIDS, to be most potent.

2) KEEPING A JOURNAL on the school experience -- and relating what was observed in the schools with course themes and issues -- helped the undergraduates focus their thoughts on the teaching process.

3) DISCUSSIONS between the INSTRUCTOR and the undergraduates, and among undergraduates, also enhanced student interest in the teaching profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

I. Design courses with: 1) a field experience which involves working with children in a school setting, 2) in-class opportunities for discussing and relating these experiences to broader, more theoretical issues in education, and 3) opportunities for reflective thought and writing about schools, education and society.

II. Give careful thought to the selection of readings. (While 38% of our students said they benefited from our selections, 55% responded the readings had no effect on enhancing their interest in the course, and 7% were turned off by the readings. Recently Charles has used Tracy Kidder's Among School Children (1989) to help students orient themselves to the task of observing what goes on in schools.)

III. More research is needed to understand the role that the introductory foundations of education course plays at liberal arts colleges. Specifically, this involves not only looking at these courses as a starting point for teachers to-be, but also as courses that inform non-educators about issues in education, and courses that lure undergraduates toward the teaching profession.

IV. Until research proves otherwise, introductory foundations of education courses should be open to all undergraduates at liberal art colleges. In addition to being an important starting point for training teachers, these courses can be effective in informing non-educators about the relationship between education and society, and attracting other undergraduates into the teaching profession.

References

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Kidder, T. (1989). Among school children. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Sirotnik, K.A. (1990). On the eroding foundations of teacher education. Phi Delta Kappan, 71(9), 710-716.

Wilson, S.M. (1990). The secret garden of teacher education. Phi Delta Kappan, 72(3), 204-209.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Fig. 1.1 GENDER

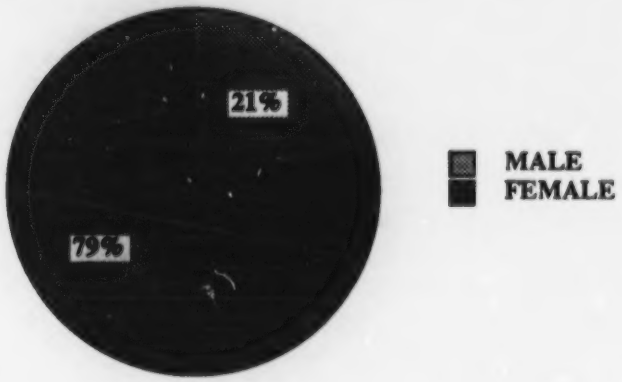


Fig. 1.2 - YEAR

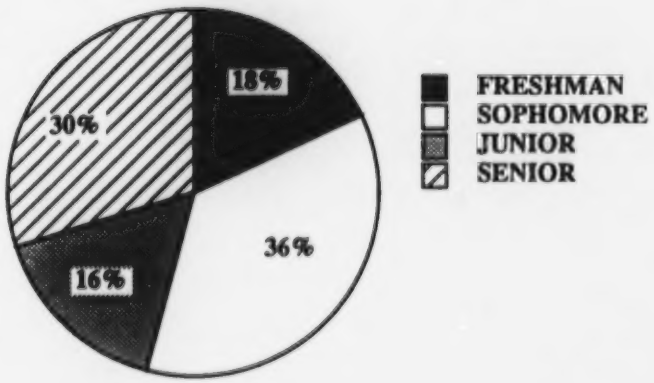
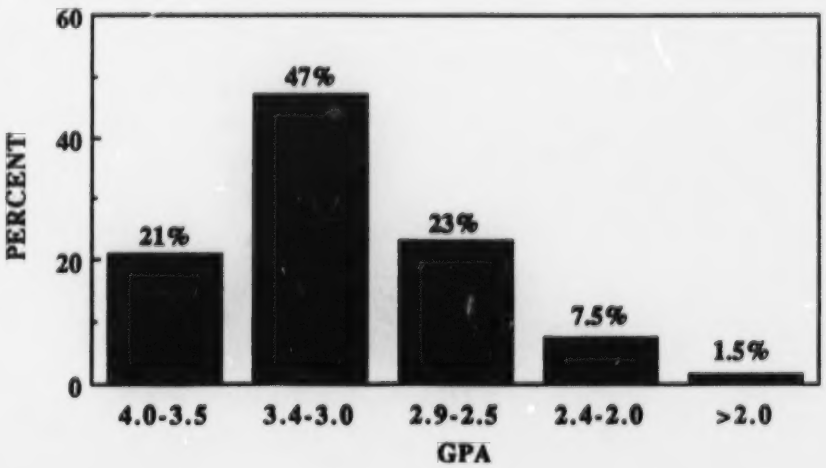


Fig. 1.3 - GRADE POINT AVERAGE



MAJORS

Fig. 2.1 - INTENDED UPON ACCEPTANCE

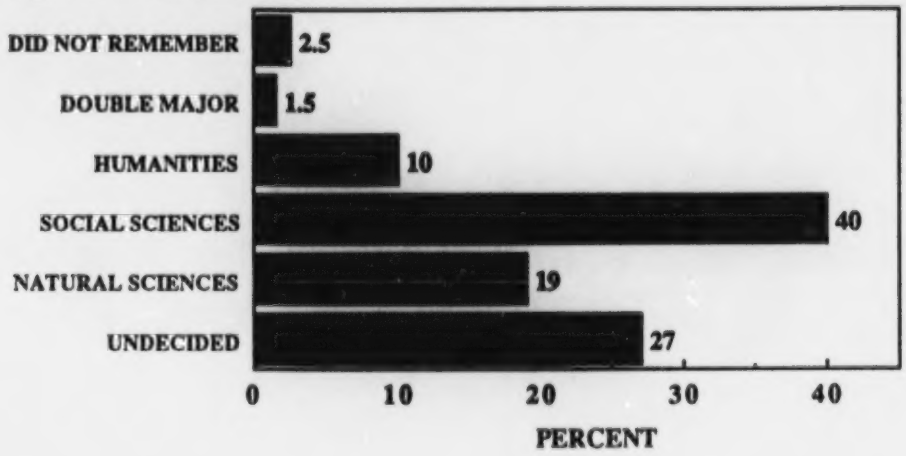


Fig. 2.2 - AT TIME ENROLLED IN EDS 201

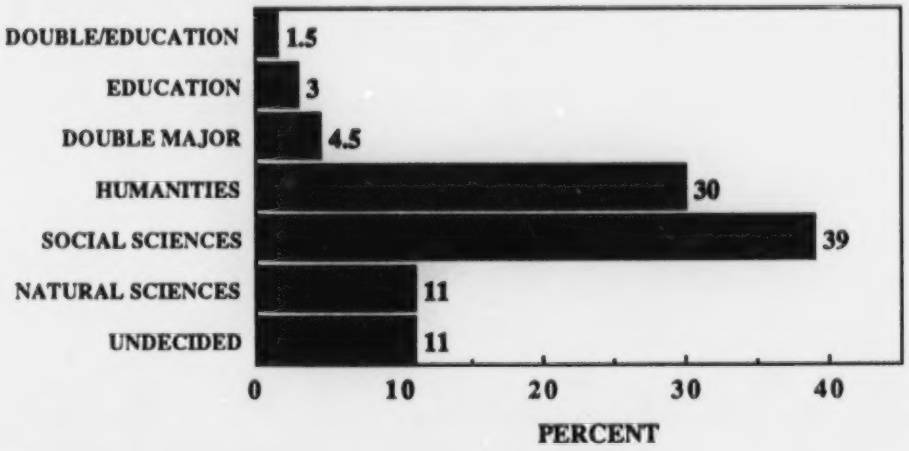
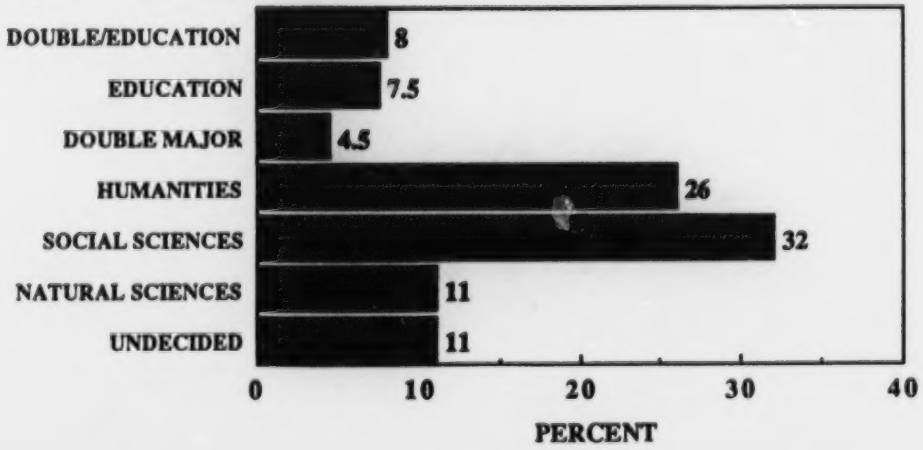


Fig. 2.3 - INTENDED UPON COMPLETION OF EDS 201



PARTS OF EDS 201 THAT ENHANCED INTEREST IN TEACHING

Fig. 3.1 - FIELD EXPERIENCE

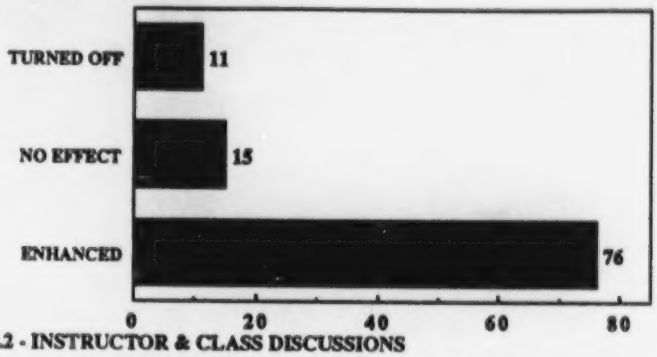


Fig. 3.2 - INSTRUCTOR & CLASS DISCUSSIONS

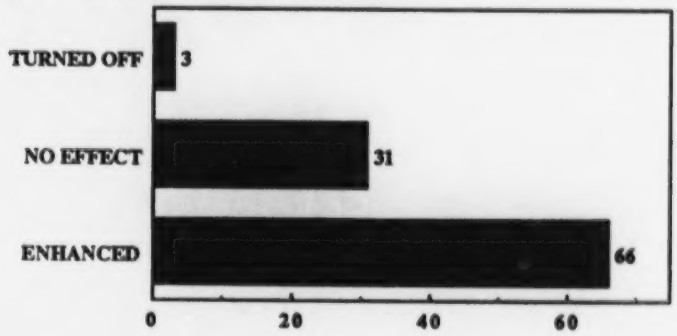


Fig. 3.3 - VIDEOS

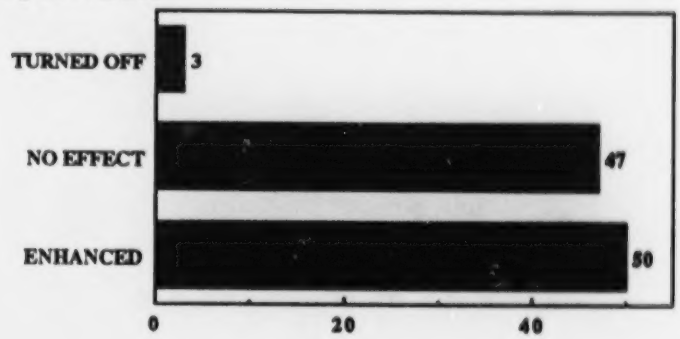
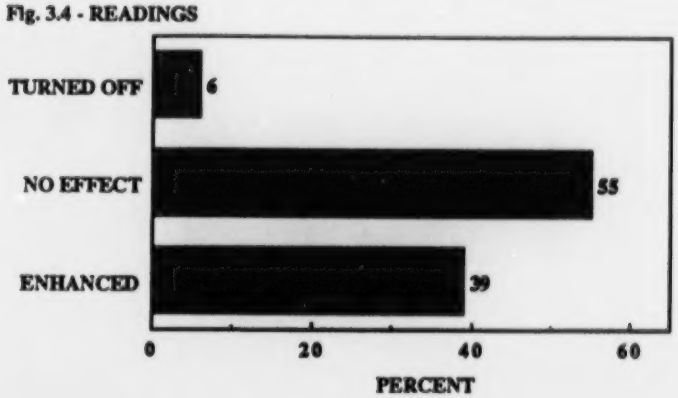


Fig. 3.4 - READINGS



FIELD EXPERIENCE

Fig. 4.1 - WORKING WITH CHILDREN

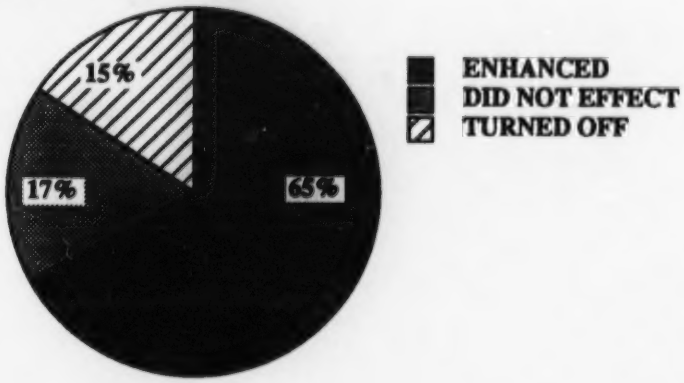


Fig. 4.2 - SUPERVISING TEACHER

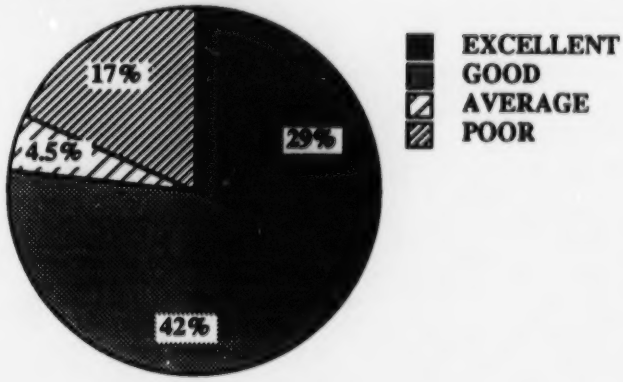


Fig. 4.3 - THE JOURNAL